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ABSTRACT

The desired goals in public speaking can only be achieved if the evaluative process is constant and presented in a way which promotes desirable attitudes toward the evaluation process. The traditional methods of criticism--e.g., hand signals, flash cards, peer criticism, and oral and written teacher comments--are either post-performance types of evaluation or lacking in privacy. The Instant Speech Evaluator, an electrically powered light panel fastened to the speaker's lectern, provides both privacy and immediate feedback. This device, operated by the instructor from the back of the room, signals the speaker regarding such things as posture, speaking rate and volume, and eye contact. Speeches are also recorded on a two channel tape recorder which records the performance of the speaker on one channel and the teacher's signals on the other. In this way, both an immediate and post-performance analysis can be made of the speech and the speaker's responses to the light signals. Although a degree of distraction may result from the light panel, the most outstanding benefit to be derived from the use of the Instant Speech Evaluator is that it will enable the student speaker to immediately experience what is desirable in a public speaking situation, after making adjustments suggested by the teacher. (JM)

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THE INSTANT SPEECH EVALUATOR

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"Speech is man's most distinctive and significant behavior. Speech is learned, and it is learned from teachers. The "teachers" include all members of the social groups in which the child moves as well as the persons who give direct attention to speech instruction in formal educational settings. The learning of speech and the force and efficiency of the habits developed are matters of utmost consequence to the individual and his society . . . Speech habits are important to vocational success and effective citizenship."

That quotation is from a report prepared for the Speech Association of America by Smith, Weaver and Wallace, entitled, "The Field of Speech: Its Function and Scope in Education." I chose that quotation since it calls attention to the habit aspect of speech and the influencing factor of the model, regardless of professional status. Education is charged with the responsibility of aiding in the maximum development of the potentialities of the student so that he can become individually effective in society. Developing the ability of effective oral self-expression is an important aspect of the realm of education and is the more specific responsibility of courses offered in public speaking, presently more broadly referred to as communication skills.

To the classroom teacher in public speaking, effective evaluation of a student speaker, so as to effect the greatest amount of communicative improvement and the building of the most positive speech attitudes, is of vital importance. Balcer and Seabury stated, "The desired goals in public speaking can only be achieved if the evaluative process is constant and presented in such a way as to promote a desirable attitude toward evaluation in the classroom in speech education. Students develop by knowing and understanding why they are doing what they are doing, by setting up new goals or objectives, and by evaluating their efforts in achieving them."

Evaluation of student performances by teachers in public speaking classes has been carried out in a multiplicity of ways and the timing for the evaluation has varied from prior to the speech, during the speech and after the speech has been concluded. Criticism of a student speaker can be positive or negative or both; it can be oral, visual or written and in combination of several of these methods. In each of these types of evaluation, used either singly or in combination, it appears that one important aspect of evaluation has been neglected and that is the aspect of privacy. To add public criticism to an already nervous, novice speaker at the conclusion of his speech, may tend to increase the degree of stage fright in his next performance and encourage negative attitudes toward criticism and his ability to become an effective speaker.

In a study relating classroom criticism and speech attitudes, Bostrom stated:

> The fact that evaluative criticism made after a speech affects speech attitudes is undoubtedly the result of many different factors. Grades are reinforcers, and a teacher's comments are certainly closely connected with grades in a student's mind. The speaking performance and its subsequent evaluation can also be viewed as a social interaction.

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The social interaction to which Bostrom referred was further researched by Miller who stated:

> This study also shows that a variation in audience response to two individuals speaking successively exercises a strong effect on the second speaker's verbal behavior.
>
> Optimum conditions for developing such skills as fluency and for improving in such attitudes as self-confidence depend not only upon the nature of the reinforcing contingencies extended to a particular speaker but also upon the kinds of response received by his immediate predecessors.

These studies serve to call attention to the need for a private system of evaluation offered in such a way as to be unobservable and in-audible to the speakers to follow and to the audience. The need for a more adequate method of evaluation became apparent after having used several of the conventional methods of speech evaluation over a period of several years.

An analysis of the speech class situation in the secondary school and my desire for a more rapid and noticeable improvement in speech proficiency, resulted in three possible conclusions.

1. The students enrolled in the speech classes were not genuinely interested or properly motivated toward speech improvement.
2. Due to the large class sizes ranging from 30 to 35 students, there is not sufficient opportunity for students to perform in a course of one semester.
3. The method of evaluation required refinement and improvement so as to hasten the desired results.

To verify the certitude of conclusion (1) above, the scholastic records of students with a 3.5 plus average were reviewed to determine if the performance level of such students had dropped in other academic areas to reflect a general deterioration of school interest. Generally, that was not the case.

Since conclusion (2) above involved a statistic over which I had no control, since maximum class size of 30 to 35 students per class is usually adherred to, no further study was made, although the factor of class size can be assumed to have some effect on the performance frequency and subsequent improvement of the students.

It appeared then that for the benefit of both the student and the teacher, conclusion (3) above should be given further consideration, if the desired improvement is to be noticeably hastened and improved.

A brief listing of the evaluation methods used to date and which appeared inadequate in attaining the desired, immediate speech improvement follows:

1. The students were instructed in the interpretation of various hand signals which the teacher might use while seated at the rear of the room. Results: The novice speaker had not yet developed favorable eye contact techniques with his audience and thus many of the teacher's hand signals went unobserved.
2. Oral criticism by the teacher, both positive and negative, so as not to frustrate efforts toward improvement, were made at the conclusion of the speech. Results: The criticism was heard and immediately forgotten so

that no improvement in a particular area of speech delivery was evident during the next speaking performance.

3. Large printed signs were held aloft by the teacher at the back of the room. Results: If the student speaker had difficulty in reading the sign, he would lean forward and squint to read it and immediately his audience turned to read the sign also, thus damaging the speaker-audience rapport.

4. The class was invited to offer general comments at the conclusion of the speech. Results: The student evaluations deteriorated into a "mutual admiration society" or everything was so well done that there was no room for improvement; at least that was the impression which the speaker gleaned from the comments.

5. Three by five inch cards calling for comments on specific aspects of the performance by various students were distributed among the class audience. Results: These criticisms too, generally deteriorated into pure compliment even when glaring errors and deficiencies in delivery were quite evident.

6. In conjunction with all of the above methods of speech evaluation, I gave each speaker a written evaluation form which contained both positive and negative criticisms of the performance. Results: The evaluation was noted and filed in a folder and not referred to again prior to the next speech activity.

Please note that each of the above systems or methods of evaluation are post-performance types of criticism and thus it became increasingly more apparent that a more meaningful method and a more advantageous time for evaluation had to be devised. The idea of a visual and spontaneous means of evaluation began to take shape and joining these two aspects with that of privacy and negative, as opposed to positive criticism, I constructed the device which would satisfy all four of these requirements and which I called the "Instant Speech Evaluator".

In a discussion of methods of evaluation and diagnosis, Robinson and Kerikas state on the subject of immediate and interrupting criticism:

> When an error is made, or at an appropriate point, the teacher stops him, points out his weakness, suggests ways of improving it, and asks him to try to correct it on the spot.
>
> It assumes the student will accept the interruption without breakdown or embarrassment and be able to continue the talk. It also assumes that the item criticized can be corrected on the spot.

Much of what is stated in the foregoing quotation is based on assumptions that the speaker will make the necessary adjustment in his delivery and that the interruption will not be too disruptive so as to prevent his finishing his talk.

With reference to the effects of negative versus positive criticism Bostrom stated:

> It would seem that poorer speakers receive more change from negative evaluative comments. We could also maintain that the better speakers experienced more change from positive comments.
>
> The most obvious conclusion we can draw from this study is

> that we should probably reevaluate the present practice of "immediate and oral" criticism following students' performances. If our purpose is to build more positive speech attitudes, then criticism should be positive in nature. If the practice of negative criticism is too valuable educationally to be dropped, clearly some other provision would seem to be necessary in the building of positive speech attitudes.

It would seem then that the objection raised by Bostrom is in the combination of immediate, oral and negative as they affect speech attitudes, rather than immediate, visual and negative as they affect speech proficiency. If, as Bostrom stated, the poorer speakers receive more change from negative evaluative comments, then education is at least partially fulfilling its obligations in the area of self-improvement for the student speaker.

METHODS AND DESIGN

The Instant Speech Evaluator is an electrically powered light panel fastened to the lectern; it is sectioned into separate divisions each of which is individually circuited to a push button control operated by the instructor from the rear of the room. When a criticism is offered, the instructor pushes a button which lights one of the panel divisions at the lectern. This criticism is a negative comment in an area needing improvement.

The study which I am now engaged in will concern itself with the negative comments of "louder" and "too fast". Since the student speeches are to be recorded for analysis, these two criticisms along with the number of non-fluencies appear to lend themselves to a more accurate study.

The speeches will be recorded by means of a stereo tape recorder. Channel 1 will be used to record the student speaker and channel 2 will be used by the instructor who will speak the letter "A" or "B" into his channel 2 microphone each time he pushes the button "louder" (A) or "too fast" (B). An audiometer will also be used to measure the improved voice projection, if any, resulting from the panel light having been indicated and verified by the instructor's channel 2 recordings.

At the beginning of the course[1] in public speaking the students will be introduced to the Instant Speech Evaluator, which at this time will offer only those comments related to posture and eye contact, so that the initial "fear" element which might be associated with the panel can be reduced. The microphone will be introduced at the second performance, but this speech will not be recorded, and the light panel will also be used, but again only for "posture" and "eye contact" criticisms. After having faced both the light panel and the microphone for two or three performances, the initial stage fright associated with their use should be controlled or at least minimized.

During the fourth performance, the speech will be recorded but the light panel will not be used; it will merely be in place on the lectern. This recording will be analyzed with reference to voice projection as measured by the audiometer, and speech rate and non-fluencies will also be determined. This recording and the resultant statistics will serve as the control element in my study.

During the fifth performance the speech will be recorded on channel 1 of the

1. This procedure, suggesting sequential learning skills, is also used as an introduction for general classroom use of the Instant Speech Evaluator.

stereo tape recorder and the criticisms of "louder" and "too fast" offered by the instructor through the use of the push buttons, will be recorded as "A" or "B" on channel 2 as outlined above.

This speech recording will then be analyzed in the same manner as the recording of the fourth speech and these findings compared with the findings from the fourth speech, when compared in the areas of voice projection, speech rate and non-fluencies, should provide the differential to either prove or negate the hypothesis that private, visual, instantaneous and negative criticism does have a positive effect in the improvement of public speaking proficiency of student speakers.

Other areas of effective public speaking can be evaluated through the use of this Instant Speech Evaluator and further studies which I have planned will measure such things as response to criticisms of posture, monotone delivery, lazy speech habits, etc.

A study of the non-fluencies was incorporated into my present study in order to determine the degree of distraction which may result from the use of this type of visual evaluative method.

The light panel must be situated on the lectern in such a way that only the speaker can see the criticisms being offered by the instructor. This aspect of privacy is one of the important specifications of this study.

In using the Instant Speech Evaluator the teacher must of course exercise good judgment as to the timing and frequency of criticisms being offered, since an excess could easily lead to total distraction for the student speaker and ultimate frustration of his speech efforts.

The most outstanding benefit to be derived from the use of the Instant Speech Evaluator, it is hoped, is that it will enable the student speaker to immediately experience what is desirable in the areas of voice projection, speech rate, etc., in a public speaking situation, after making the adjustments suggested by the teacher.

Although my study has not been completed, initial responses from my students regarding the effectiveness of the Instant Speech Evaluator have been extremely encouraging. I am hopeful that the results of my study will tend to expedite the issuance of the patent for which I have applied and is currently pending for the Instant Speech Evaluator as a meaningful teaching aid.

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